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ABSTRACT

The duties, working environment, and characteristics of the chief school administrators of the privately owned American-sponsored overseas schools are described in this paper. The document looks first at the schools themselves, touching on the make-up of their student bodies, their educational philosophies, and their governance. The history of American schools overseas is reviewed with particular attention to the provision of official support from the United States government. The characteristics of the superintendents are considered next: they differ significantly from those of administrators in the United States, though the overseas superintendents typically have had experience as school administrators in the United States. The superintendent's role is described, including his or her relationship with the school's governing board. Typical processes used by administrators for hiring personnel are noted. The paper concludes with a brief review of responses to a recent survey of current superintendents that provides further insight into their characteristics and motivations. Twenty-nine references are cited. (PGD)

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THE SUPERINTENDENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL SETTING

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THE SUPERINTENDENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL SETTING

American sponsored elementary and secondary overseas schools have been a significant part of the international education scene for nearly a century. Educating children from the United States, host countries, and a multitude of other countries, they are really multinational in curriculum, student body and school staff.

The chief school administrators who run these schools have a diversity of titles -- director, superintendent, rector, headmaster -- but they seem to experience many of the same problems as their counterparts back home. The schools range in size from under a hundred to over 2000. Each, however, is independent and not a member of a school system as are the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. They are usually parent-owned and run by a board that is variously elected and appointed as circumstances have dictated. Each employs a chief school administrator from the United States who is in charge of the overseas school operation and reports directly to the board.

A part of our heritage we all take for granted is that American children will have an opportunity to get a free, public education. But today when nearly one out of every 100 of tour citizens live outside the fifty states, those who go abroad insist that adequate educational opportunities be available for their children. For these non-military families, there exist schools which receive some support from the U.S. Department of State which likes to extol the benefits of our system of education. The pupils always include the dependent children of U.S. government employees, but in addition one finds children of other resident U.S. citizens, members of diplomatic families of many nations,

representatives of the international business community, as well as young citizens of the country in which the school is located.

Who is this overseas superintendent? What is his base of operation in terms of school and staff? How does his job differ from that of the superintendent in the United States?

The Superintendent's Setting

The overseas superintendent works in a school which is located in a country and within a culture different from the one for which the school was developed. Some students come from the same culture as the school, some from the local culture, and some represent still a third culture. Because of high tuition rates, all students come from families which are above average in socio-economic status. Although most administrators were trained in the tradition of United States Public Schools, they operate in a private school setting which tends to be highly academic in nature.

In trying to replicate American quality education, the schools transplanted the classroom techniques, curricula, and classroom organization that promoted competition and individualism rather than cooperation. For American education has been defined by those who run the schools according to its symbols--certification, diplomas, degrees, and scores--rather than by its social or academic contributions or the promotion of intercultural experiences (Stoddard, 1980).

The Office of Overseas Schools of the United States Department of State lists approximately 150 American-sponsored overseas schools (ASOS) assisted by the Department of State. These schools are completely independent but model themselves after both private and public schools in

the United States. The curricula, textbooks, instructional materials, and methods of instruction are primarily brought from the United States with some attention given to the language and culture of the host country (Orr 1976). The ASOS schools employ over 3,000 professional staff members from all parts of the United States and Canada and 2500 host country and third country staff members who work under the direction of United States trained educators (Patterson, 1980).

Superintendents of some ASOS have built excellent educational programs and facilities using a plethora of sources for guidelines anthough the schools are widely divergent in size of the student body, nationality of the students, the curriculum offerings, the time allotments, and the amound of space allocated for educational facilities (Draper, 1981).

History of American Schools Overseas

Nearly one hundred years ago United States citizens living in Mexico City established their own school in order to offer their children educational opportunities similar to those that would have been available to them in the United States . This was the first of several hundred elementary and secondary community schools which have been established since that time by United States citizens in nearly a hundred foreign countries and dependencies abroad (Honey, 1973). These schools may be parent-owned, company sponsored, government

sponsored, religiously affiliated, or profit-sharing. Most were established between 1950 and 1970.

The first financial assistance to overseas schools began in 1944 when Congress appropriated nearly a quarter of a million dollars to help a

small group of schools in Latin America. In 1957 the assistance became worldwide when United States-owned local currencies were made available for that purpose. In 1964 the Office of Overseas Schools of the Department of State was established to coordinate the programs of assistance. Schools in the American Republics differ from schools in other regions in that they can be described as being binational in character with over 50% of both students and staff being citizens of the countries in which the schools are located. This is in contrast to the seventeen schools of East Asia, 70% of whose staff and student body are United States citizens. Located in 80 different countries, most of the schools have an enrollment under 600 although a few have grown to over 2000 students (Luebke, 1976).

Who is this Superintendent?

Roth (1972) found that chief school administrators are well educated, married males in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Both they and their dependents like their life style and they intend to make overseas educational work a career. They have changed jobs on the average of one to six times and most had been in their present position less than four years. These superintendents feel there are opportunities for professional advacement and professional growth overseas and that foreign language fluency is not a dominant factor.

Since criteria for screening and selecting for this position have not been developed, Vest (1971) used the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire to compare the profile of overseas superintendents with the profile of characteristics of school administrators in the United States. The personality characteristics were significantly different enough so as

to reject the "good-man-at-home-is- a-good-man-abroad" theory. Schaffer (1980) studied the stress perception among superintendents in overseas schools. Nearly half of the respondents reported their jobs to be usually or always stressful and less than half had adopted compensating practices that they considered to be highly successful.

Chief school administrators are people who maintain a cluster of relationships with one or more social institutions within the local, national, and international community. Superintendent's interaction with the Binational Community are influenced by the size and composition of the expatriate community, the mobile nature of the various segments, and the different cultural notions each segment holds about the means for educating children and youth. Most felt that meeting the needs of highly mobile children from diverse educational and socio-cultural backgrounds was a challenge (Bentz, 1972).

The Role of the Superintendent

Almost all of the superintendents had administrative experience in the United States Public Schools, yet they operate in private schools in that almost all of the ASOS schools are parent-owned. Financing and record keeping are not standardized although certain forms must be filled out for the Office of Overseas Schools in order to receive grants. Schools report from 80% to 98% of income comes from tuition and fees of various sorts. Wide interpretations of the role of the governing board ranges from minimal participation to the inclusion of administrative and procedural functions normally delegated to the chief administrative officer and his staff. Most of these boards have female members and most have some non-American members. The majority of members have lived

overseas more than 5 years. Adams (1976) found that there are few controls for board members. There is no code of ethics for school board members of ASOS, no specific policy on expulsion of school board members and few board policies on employing school personnel. When boards do not leave the governance up to the superintendent there is no state agency to contact. Many superintendents seem to solve the problem by moving to another country and letting another administrator rearrange circumstances in the pre-contract negotiations.

In Latin America Harvey (1976) discovered that almost half of the board members had received no training or orientation to their duties and responsibilities on the governing bodies although all of the guides for the schools specify the need. Recently the Department of State has begun sponsoring yearly regional meetings for board members (Fox, 1981). These however have not always proved advantageous for superintendents for contracts have been known to be cancelled soon after the return of board members from such meetings.

Wide interpretations of the role of the governing board ranged from minimal participation to the inclusion of administrative and procedural functions normally delegated to the chief administrative officer and his staff. Governing board duties and responsibilities were determined as each member interpreted his role. This too explains the protracted negotiations that are necessary before an administator accepts employment.

Boards of education of ASOS do employ a significant number of women to administer their schools. These women are generally married, have children at home and employ outside help to perform domestic tasks. In many areas this household help was easily obtained. The women reported few difficulties in seeking and securing their present positions. They

perceive themselves as confident to perform administrative tasks. (Plummer, 1979)

As of 1979, the chief school administrators of ASOS do not fully agree on the applicability of Public Law 94-142 standards for their schools. They report themselves confused about their legal obligations to handicapped students. Admission policies, lack of trained personnel, lack of facilities and excessive costs were mentioned as obstacles. More than 1500 pupils were identified as handicapped by superintendents in 1978-79 but only about 2/3 were receiving special services. (Loughlin, 1979)

The Hiring Process

Recruitment and retention of import-teachers is one of the constant problems of the overseas superintendent. And the process is certainly different. Each year most superintendents travel around the United States to college campuses and to placement fairs seeking those teachers best able to make the adjustment to life and work in an different culture. Selection is difficult because the criteria that must be considered are not only professional but personal as well.

In 1979 Rushcamp found that a pre-arrival orientation was needed to assist newly hired American expatriate teachers in adjusting to the new environment in Near East-South Asia schools. The schools of the Carribbean area did in fact set up such an orientation in Miami. Calhoun (1977) found that in Europe teachers with more and varied experience adjusted better. Knowledge of the host country language together with positive cross-cultural motives and expectations was helpful. In Latin American schools it was found that retention could be increased when Superintendents assisted with adjustment in affective areas such as shopping, meeting

people, pursuit of hobbies and opportunities for leisure time (Sheppard, 1981).

The Current Superintendents

Of the superintendents from about 35 of the larger overseas schools who responded to a survey mailed in 1985, 96% have advanced degrees in educational administration and a surprising 40% have doctoral degrees. Over 75% had ten or more years of experience and 65% have worked both in the United States and 2 or more foreign countries. Most were not in their first administrative position (Lockledge, 1985). This is in contrast to 15 or 20 years ago when many of these positions were filled from people already at the school regardless of formal qualifications.

In the same survey when asked why one would choose to work overseas, administrators frequently mentioned travel, the quality of life and the multinational experience. Students were mentioned consistently. It seems they are more academically oriented, more challenging, more diverse as compared with their counterparts in the United States. They were described as more easily motivated, less hard to control, and generally grouped in smaller classes. The word quality was used again and again as was the word culture. There is, in the opinion of these superintendents, quality in students, the school organization, the educational experience and the way of life. This may result from cultural diversity, cultural interchange, cultural enlightenment or just living in a different culture.

When asked why they first went overseas the answers of the overseas superintendents were quite varied. Some went for purely professional reasons--the challenge of the position, job difficulty in the United States, new experience, interesting opportunity, as a culmination to a

career. Others were attracted by the adventure and chance to travel. A few came for other purposes and stayed on. Most were somehow intrigued by the idea of a new country and a different culture.

Conclusion

The superintendent of an overseas American school may live a somewhat more exciting-sounding life but it seems he confronts many of the same conflicts as he would have in the United States. He works for constantly changing boards, struggles to find good teachers, deals with a diverse community. Although more independent--lacking the constraints of a state education agency--he is also more subject to sudden displacement. Perhaps it is only for the few, the bold, the adventurous.....

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